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SIPDIS

WHA/CCA FOR DAVID MCFARLAND

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/08/2018
TAGS: [ETRD](#) [ETTC](#) [PREL](#) [CU](#) [BF](#)
SUBJECT: BAHAMAS REVIEW FOR SUSPENSION OF TITLE III OF THE
LIBERTAD ACT

REF: STATE 126578

Classified By: DCM Zuniga-Brown for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Post recommends waiver of the provisions of Title III of the Libertad Act for The Bahamas. The Bahamas has had a cordial relationship with Cuba, has supported Cuba in international fora, and has engaged in both cultural and economic exchanges with Cuba, including promotion of Cuban trade. The Bahamian government under Prime Minister Hubert Ingraham has a more skeptical approach, but recently appointed a veteran immigration official as new ambassador to Cuba. The Prime Minister traveled to Cuba December 8 for a CARICOM-Cuba high-level meeting. The extremely close bilateral cooperation between The Bahamas and the U.S. in drug interdiction, alien interdiction, anti-terrorism and border security, however, merits a waiver of the provisions of the Libertad Act. END SUMMARY.

Bahamas-Cuba Diplomatic Relations

¶2. (C) The Governments of The Bahamas and Cuba have maintained cordial relations. The Prime Minister traveled to Cuba December 8 for a CARICOM-Cuba high-level meeting. The Bahamas justifies the need for its relations by citing the need to provide consular services, to address bilateral migration issues, explaining the appointment of an experienced immigration official to the post of ambassador, and to promote trade and travel. The Bahamian government has also noted the need for close relations to avoid repetition of incidents such as the 1980 sinking by Cuban forces of a Bahamian Defense Force vessel resulting in the deaths of several Bahamian sailors. Like the U.S., the Bahamian government works with Cuba to combat drug and migrant trafficking. The Government of Cuba maintains an embassy in Nassau, and a new Ambassador was accredited in late August ¶2007. The Bahamas did not offer or deliver official humanitarian or other assistance to the Cuban people in the wake of Hurricanes Gustav and Ike, though it did provide aid to Haiti and the Turks and Caicos Islands.

¶3. (C) Illegal migration to The Bahamas from other Caribbean states, Haiti and Cuba in particular, is one of the country's biggest political issues. Illegal Cuban migrants interdicted in Bahamian waters are detained in Nassau. The repatriation process is lengthy and expensive. Controversies surrounding the presence of Cuban migrants in The Bahamas occasionally arise. The GCOB sees a pragmatic need to maintain a relationship with Cuba to manage repatriation and any concomitant international complications.

Business and Cultural Exchanges

¶4. (C) Direct Bahamian investment in Cuba is minimal given The Bahamas' exchange controls, limited scope for

international investment among Bahamian businesses, and the country's economic dependence on the United States. Third country investment in Cuba via Bahamian financial institutions is likely, but unknown. According to the GCOB, The Bahamas imported less than \$5 million in Cuban goods in 2007, with few to no exports. There are currently no bilateral trade agreements in force.

15. (C) There is a Havantur office in Nassau and Cubana Airlines offers 5 direct flights to Havana from Nassau weekly. The GCOB in October 2008 extended for another year an agreement allowing 40 Cuban teachers to teach special education, Spanish, math and science in The Bahamas. Over the five years of the program, over 60 Cuban teachers reportedly worked in 11 outer islands at the primary and secondary levels. The GCOB is considering resuming a Cuban eye care program, which it stopped for review upon taking office in May 2007, amidst opposition criticism for ignoring a useful benefit. Approximately 600 Bahamians received Cuban-paid health care in Cuba and Cuban doctors provided approximately 1,750 eye exams to Bahamians in The Bahamas in 2007. According to the GCOB, approximately 20,000 Bahamians visit Cuba each year and approximately 150 Bahamian students study in Cuba on scholarship.

Bahamian Support for Human Rights

16. (C) The Bahamas has worked to promote the advancement of democracy and human rights in Cuba, though more could be done. The Bahamian Government which took office following May 2, 2007 elections did not downgrade relations with Cuba from a full Embassy to a Consulate, as intimated before the

elections, and appointed a new ambassador to Cuba in September 2008. The GCOB has supported human rights in international fora, including all U.S.-sponsored country-specific resolutions in the UNGA Third Committee in late 2008, for the third year running. The Bahamas has in the past typically voted with CARICOM and the NAM in international fora and continues to oppose the U.S. embargo of Cuba.

Recommendation for Waiver

17. (C) In light of the extremely close on-going bilateral cooperation between the U.S. and The Bahamas in drug interdiction, alien interdiction, anti-terrorism, and border security matters, Post believes The Bahamas should continue to be granted a waiver from implementation of Title III of the Libertad Act.

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